

Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program School Year 2021-22 (July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. It allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste. OVS must be implemented at lunch in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades. OVS is not allowed for preschoolers (ages 1-4) or the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.

Detailed guidance on OVS is available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Overview of OVS at Lunch

OVS applies to the daily meal pattern requirements. To implement OVS, school food authorities (SFAs) must offer all five food components in at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group in the NSLP meal pattern. For a reimbursable lunch under OVS, students must select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables, and the full serving of at least two other food components.


- A **food component** is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch, including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat/meat alternates (MMA).
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five food components. It may contain one or more food components, or more than one serving of the same component. For example, a hamburger patty (MMA component) on a whole-grain bun (grains component) is one food item that contains two food components. A selection of three different $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings of fruit (such as peaches, applesauce, and pears) includes three food items from one food component (fruits).

Table 1 summarizes the daily NSLP meal pattern requirements for grades K-12 and the number of food components that students may decline under OVS.



Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Table 1. Summary of OVS requirements for lunch

SFA must offer five components ¹	Student may decline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk ² • Fruits ^{3, 4} • Vegetables ^{4, 5, 6} • Grains ⁷ • MMA ⁸ 	<p>One or two food components, but must take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables</p> 
<p>¹ Each component must be at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group in the NSLP meal pattern.</p> <p>² Allowable types of milk include unflavored low-fat (1%) milk and unflavored or flavored fat-free milk. SFAs must offer at least two different varieties, and at least one milk choice must be unflavored.</p> <p>³ The fruits component includes fresh, frozen, canned (in juice, water, or light syrup), and dried fruits; and pasteurized full-strength fruit juice. Fruits credit based on volume (cups), except dried fruits credit as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component. Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly amount of the fruits component offered at lunch. For more information, visit the “Fruits Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p> <p>⁴ The juice limit includes juice that is fresh, frozen, or made from concentrate; frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice; pureed fruits or vegetables in fruit or vegetable smoothies; and juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice, unless the canned fruit is drained or served as an extra food. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP and Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP; and section 4 of the CSDE’s Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12.</p> <p>⁵ The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables; and pasteurized full-strength vegetable juice. Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly amount of the vegetables component offered at lunch. A serving of cooked vegetables must be drained. For example, a serving of canned corn cannot include the water in which it is packed. Dried vegetables (such as potato flakes) credit when rehydrated only if the manufacturer’s product formulation statement (PFS) provides specific documentation on the amount of vegetables per serving. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served (e.g., 1 cup credits as ½ cup of vegetables). For more information, visit the “Vegetables Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p> <p>⁶ The NSLP meal pattern requires minimum weekly servings of five vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange, starchy, legumes, and other). Students are not required to select each subgroup, but SFAs must provide the opportunity for students to select each subgroup. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resource, Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP.</p> <p>⁷ All grains must be whole grain-rich (WGR). For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12, Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP, and Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP; and visit the “Grains Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p> <p>⁸ The MMA component must be served in a main dish, or in a main dish and only one other food item.</p>	

Overview of OVS in the NSLP

For a lunch to be reimbursable under OVS, SFAs must meet the criteria below.

- **Menu planning:** Lunch menus must include five food components (milk, meat/meat alternates, vegetables, fruits, and grains). The planned serving for each food component must be at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group in the NSLP meal pattern. The grains, fruits, and vegetables components may be offered in more than one food item. The meat/meat alternates component must be offered as a main dish, or a main dish and one other food item. Milk must be offered as the full 1-cup serving. For information on the NSLP meal patterns, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and refer to section 1 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).
- **Offering a component as two separate food items:** If the lunch menu offers the component's full serving (minimum daily amount) as two separate food items, students must take **both** food items to credit as one component for OVS. For example, if the lunch menu for grades 9-12 provides the required 2 ounce equivalents (oz eq) of meat/meat alternates from $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq) and 1 ounce of low-fat cheese (1 oz eq), students must select both food items to credit as the meat/meat alternates component for OVS. The yogurt or cheese stick alone does not credit because each serving is less than 2 oz eq. Table 2 shows some examples of offering the full component as two food items for grades K-5 and 6-8. Table 3 shows some examples of offering the full component as two food items for grades 9-12.
- **Larger amounts:** SFAs may serve larger amounts of any component if the weekly lunch menu does not exceed the USDA's dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium (refer to the dietary specifications, refer to section 6 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#). **Note:** SFAs must serve additional grains on some days to meet the NSLP meal pattern's minimum weekly requirements for grades K-5 and 6-8. For more information, refer to section 4 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).
- **Unit pricing:** Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they select three, four, or five food components. SFAs must establish one price for a complete reimbursable lunch in the paid meal category and one price for a complete reimbursable lunch in the reduced-price meal category. SFAs may set different unit prices (tiered pricing) for various combinations of foods offered as a reimbursable lunch. However, all students, including those eligible for free and reduced-price meals, must be allowed to select any reimbursable lunch. Lunches with a higher unit price must be available at no cost for all free-eligible students, and at no more than 40 cents for all reduced-eligible students.



Overview of OVS in the NSLP

- **Identifying reimbursable meals:** SFAs should plan lunch menus to make it easy for students to select (and food service staff to identify) reimbursable meals. SFAs must post signage that clearly communicates the meal components for each menu choice, and indicates what students must select for a reimbursable meal. SFAs should also provide training for school food service staff on the NSLP meal pattern components, including how to recognize reimbursable meals under OVS. For guidance on signage and staff training, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.
- **Required student selections:** Students must select at least three of the five food components offered, including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least two other food components. Selections of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a food item for OVS, unless the student also selects additional fruits or vegetables to provide at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. To encourage selections of reimbursable meals, SFAs should offer all fruits and vegetables in $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings.
- **Declining foods:** Students may decline any one or two of the required food components, except for at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students may take smaller portions of the declined food components. However, selections of less than the full serving cannot credit as a food component for OVS. For example, if a lunch menu for grades K-5 provides the required 1 oz eq of grains from $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq of brown rice and $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq whole-grain roll, students must select both items to credit as the full grains component for OVS. The brown rice or roll alone do not credit because each serving is less than 1 oz eq.
- **Selecting more than the full serving:** SFAs may allow students to select more than the full serving of any component. However, selections of additional servings from the same component credit as only one component for OVS. For example, a lunch for grades 9-12 provides 3 oz eq of grains from 1 cup of brown rice (2 oz eq) and a 1-ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq). If a student selects both food items, they credit as only one component (grains) for OVS. For a reimbursable meal, the student must also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least one other component.



Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Table 2. Offering the full component as two food items for grades K-5 and 6-8

Planned menu items (meal component and minimum daily amount)	Required student selection for full component (minimum daily amount)
Fruits (F): ½ cup ¼ cup of peaches ¼ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of F. Students could select ¼ cup of F if they also select at least ½ cup of V and the full serving of at least two components.
Vegetables (V): ¾ cup ½ cup of carrots ¼ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of V. However, the carrots meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students could select ½ cup of carrots if they also select the full serving of at least two other components, one of which could be ½ cup of F. Students could select ¼ cup of tomatoes if they also select at least ¼ cup of F and the full serving of at least two other components.
Meat/meat alternates (MMA): 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) 1 tablespoon of peanut butter (½ oz eq) ¼ cup of yogurt (½ oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of MMA. Students could select either the peanut butter or yogurt alone if they also select at least ½ cup of F or V and the full serving of at least two other components.
Grains (G): 1 oz eq Two packages of whole-grain crackers (½ oz eq each)	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of G. Students could select one package of crackers if they also select at least ½ cup of F or V and the full serving of at least two other components.



Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Table 3. Offering the full component as two food items for grades 9-12

Planned menu items (meal component and minimum daily amount)	Required student selection for full component (minimum daily amount)
F: 1 cup ½ cup of peaches ½ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of F. However, each ½-cup serving meets the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students could select ½ cup of F if they also select the full serving of at least two components, one of which could be 1 cup of V. ¹
V: 1 cup ½ cup of green peppers ½ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of V. However, each ½-cup serving meets the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students could select ½ cup of V if they also select the full serving of at least two components, one of which could be 1 cup of F. ¹
MMA: 2 oz eq ½ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq) 1 ounce low-fat cheese stick (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of MMA. Students could select either the yogurt or cheese alone if they also select at least ½ cup of F or V, and the full serving of at least two components.
G: 2 oz eq ½ cup of whole grain-rich pasta (1 oz eq) 1 ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the full serving of G. Students could select either the pasta or roll alone if they also select at least ½ cup of F or V and the full serving of at least two components.
¹ SFAs must provide clear signage informing students that they may select either one or two fruit servings and either one or two vegetable servings.	

Examples of OVS at Lunch

Tables 4 and 5 show examples of OVS at lunch. For additional guidance and more OVS examples, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*



Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Table 4. OVS examples at lunch for grades K-5 and 6-8

Planned lunch menu		Meal pattern components		
Turkey (1 ounce) and low-fat cheese (1 ounce)		MMA, 2 oz eq		
Whole-wheat bread, 2 slices (1 ounce each)		G, 2 oz eq		
Broccoli florets, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup		V, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup		
Cantaloupe wedges, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup		F, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup		
Choice of unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored/flavored fat-free milk, 1 cup		M, 1 cup		
Students must select at least three of the five food components offered, including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables, and the full serving of at least two other components.				
Student selects	Food items	Full food components <i>Must be at least 2</i>	At least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V <i>Must be "Yes"</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and M) but is missing at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V.
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe (F)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and F).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli (V)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and V).
Broccoli (V) Cantaloupe (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (V, F, and M).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli (V) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes	Yes. The meal contains four full components (MMA, G, V, and M).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe (F) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes	Yes. The meal contains four full components (MMA, G, F, and M).

Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Table 5. OVS examples at lunch for grades 9-12

Planned lunch menu		Meal pattern components		
Turkey (1 ounce) and low-fat cheese (1 ounce)		MMA, 2 oz eq		
Whole-wheat bread, 2 ounces		G, 2 oz eq		
Broccoli florets, 1 cup		V, 1 cup		
Cantaloupe wedges, 1 cup		F, 1 cup		
Choice of unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored/flavored fat-free milk, 1 cup		M, 1 cup		
Students must select at least three of the five food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables, and the full serving of at least two other components.				
Student selects	Food items	Full food components <i>Must be at least 2</i>	At least ½ cup of F or V <i>Must be “Yes”</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V. ¹
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe (F)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and F).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli (V)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (MMA, G, and V).
Broccoli (V) Cantaloupe (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (V, F, and M).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli (V) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes	Yes. The meal contains four full components (MMA, G, V, and M).
Turkey and cheese sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe (F) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes	Yes. The meal contains four full components (MMA, G, F, and M).

Overview of OVS in the NSLP

Resources

Crediting Foods for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Meal or No Meal Activity: Lunch (from the CSDE's presentation "What's for Lunch? Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements for the National School Lunch Program"):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Pattern-Training-Materials/Documents>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

National School Lunch Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/National-School-Lunch-Program>

Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Offer-versus-Serve-for-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Offer versus Serve Guidance for the NSLP and SBP (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP41-2015av2.pdf>

Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVsguide.pdf>

Offer versus Serve Materials (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-versus-serve-national-school-lunch-program-posters>

Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: National School Lunch Program (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-lunch-program-tip-sheet>

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Program-Guidance-School-Nutrition-Programs>

USDA Memo SP 24-2020, CACFP 13-2020 and SFSP 13-2020: Questions and Answers for the Child Nutrition Programs during School Year 2020-2021:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/questions-and-answers-child-nutrition-programs-during-sy-2020-21>

Overview of OVS in the NSLP



For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*, and visit the CSDE's [OVS](#) webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/Overview_OVS_NSLP.pdf.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at: [How to File a Complaint](#), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of affirmative action/equal opportunity for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of age, ancestry, color, civil air patrol status, criminal record (in state employment and licensing), gender identity or expression, genetic information, intellectual disability, learning disability, marital status, mental disability (past or present), national origin, physical disability (including blindness), race, religious creed, retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, sex (pregnancy or sexual harassment), sexual orientation, veteran status or workplace hazards to reproductive systems, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes.

Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Levy Gillespie, Equal Employment Opportunity Director/Americans with Disabilities Coordinator (ADA), Connecticut State Department of Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 505, Hartford, CT 06103, 860-807-2071, levy.gillespie@ct.gov.